

— Capsule Summary  
SM-554  
Bell Motor Company-Used Cars Building  
Leonardtown  
Private

c. 1947-1948

The Bell Motor Company-Used Cars Building represents a significant commercial building located on Washington Street, just north of the center of Leonardtown, Maryland. The Bell Motors chevrolet franchise, started on January 17, 1923 by J. Ernest Bell and T. Webster Bell, erected the one story common bond brick building in the late 1947-1948 in response to the increase in sales caused by the return of veterans at the end of World War II and the opening and growth of the Patuxent Naval Air Station. This building originally sold mostly farming implements, tractors, and other appliances, but in the early 1980s, the Bell's decided to use the building for the sale of used automobiles.

— The brick building easily accomodated this change. Its large and expansive interior easily housed many cars and could also be used for the service and parts department. The casement windows and garage doors on the north and south sides provided adequate ventilation for these functions.

SM-554, Bell's Used Cars Building  
St. Mary's County  
Maryland Comprehensive State Historic Preservation Data

Historic Context

Geographic Organization:	Western Shore
Chronological/Developmental Period:	Modern, 1930-
Historic Period Theme:	Architecture, Commerce

Resource Type

Category:	Building
Historic Environment:	Town
Historic Function and Use:	Car Sales Office
Known Design Source:	None

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF  
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**State Historic Sites Inventory Form**

Survey No. SM-554

Magi No.

DOE ☐ yes ☐ no

**1. Name** (indicate preferred name)

historic Bell Motor Company-Used Cars Building

and/or common

**2. Location**

street & number 37-45 Washington Street ☐ not for publication

city, town Leonardtown ☐ vicinity of congressional district 3

state Maryland county St. Mary's

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property** (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name J. Ernest Bell, III

street & number PO Box 656 telephone no.: (301) 475-2355

city, town Leonardtown state and zip code Maryland, 20650

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Mary's County Courthouse liber EWA 1119

street & number folio 17

city, town Leonardtown state Md

**6. Representation in Existing** Historical Surveys

title

date ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

pository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

Survey No. SM-554

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved      date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Contributing Resource Count: 1

The Bell Used Cars Building is located just south of the intersection of Washington Street and Maryland Route 5. This large industrial scale building extends clear from Washington Street to the east to Lawrence Avenue to the west. The relatively level 2.1 acre tract is bounded to the north by a Burchmart convenience store and gas station and to the south by St. Peter's Chapel (SM-275). Well pruned hedges line the east border with Washington Street, but the lot is relatively free of vegetation to allow for the maximum car storage space possible and ample parking for customers.

The building itself is a long, one story, brick industrial building that extends almost one block. The brick walls are laid in an irregular common bond with irregularly colored bricks. The entire roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles and is pierced by a single large chimney stack located on the west gable end of the building.

The primary or east elevation is distinguished by five bays--a centrally located pair of metal and plate glass doors flanked on either side by two large plate glass windows. The doorway is covered by a roundish awning which is topped by a large sign that reads "Bell Used Cars." The top of the wall is stepped indicating that it is actually a false front that hides the large gable roof.

The sides of the building feature a series of small two pane casement windows, garage doors, as well as large fifteen pane metal casement windows. These doors allow cars to be serviced and transferred, while the windows permit cross-ventilation to occur.

The site also contains a large corrugated metal or plastic shelter that covers several cars fronting Washington Street. This shelter is supported by a series of metal posts and shades the cars from light and protects them from rain.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. SM-554

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

### Specific dates

### Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Bell Motor Company-Used Cars Building represents a significant commercial building located on Washington Street, just north of the center of Leonardtown, Maryland. The Bell Motors chevrolet franchise, started on January 17, 1923 by J. Ernest Bell and T. Webster Bell, erected the one story common bond brick building in the late 1947-1948 in response to the increase in sales caused by the return of veterans at the end of World War II and the opening and growth of the Patuxent Naval Air Station. This building originally sold mostly farming implements, tractors, and other appliances, but in the early 1980s, the Bell's decided to use the building for the sale of used automobiles.

The brick building easily accomodated this change. Its large and expansive interior easily housed many cars and could also be used for the service and parts department. The casement windows and garage doors on the north and south sides provided adequate ventilation for these functions.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. SM-554

Personal Interview with Tommy Bell, February, 1997.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.1 acresQuadrangle name Leonardtown, MdQuadrangle scale 1:24 000UTM References do NOT complete UTM referencesA 

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Zone Easting NorthingB 

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Zone Easting NorthingC 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Same as per deed reference.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk E. Ranzetta, Historic Sites Surveyororganization St. Mary's County Planning and Zoningdate February 1997street & number 22740 Washington Streettelephone (301) 475-4662city or town Leonardtownstate Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
DHCP/DHCD  
100 COMMUNITY PLACE  
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2023  
514-7600

SM-554, Bell Motor Company-Used Cars Building  
St. Mary's County  
8.1 Significance

Chain-of-title (Please note that all records can be found in the Land Records Office, St. Mary's County Courthouse in Leonardtown, Maryland unless otherwise noted.)

Reference: Liber EWA 1119, Folio 17

Grantee: J. Ernest Bell, III, trustee

Grantor: J E Bell et al

Date: December 31, 1996

Notes: According to estate no 5335, the heirs of J. Ernest Bell receive equal shares of his estate that includes the 2.1 acre property and building on 37-45 Washington Street.

Reference: Liber CBG 19, Folio 527

Grantee: J. Ernest Bell, and T. Webster Bell

Grantor: Ida J. Payne, widow

Date: April 22, 1947

Notes: This deed combines a 1 1/2 acre parcel (Parcel #1) and 3/5 acre parcel (Parcel #2). Parcel #1 was located fronting Washington Street, while Parcel #2 was located fronting Lawrence Avenue.

Parcel #1

Reference: Liber JFF 12, Folio 598

Grantee: L. Ernest Payne

Grantor: Alice Morgan

Date: August 25, 1891

Notes: This deed notes that the parcel contains 4 acres. It was probably subdivided later.

Reference: Liber JTB 2, Folio 226-228

Grantee: George C. Morgan

Grantor: H. G. S Key

Date: February 13, 1856

Notes: Key sells a four acre tract bounded on two sides by main roads leading into Leonardtown to George C. Morgan for \$1450. The conveyance also notes that Morgan was already erecting a dwelling on the property at the time the deed was recorded.

Parcel #2

Reference: Liber EBA 12, Folio 113

Grantee: L. Ernest Payne

Grantor: Asa A. Lawrence

Date: October 10, 1913

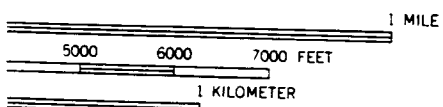
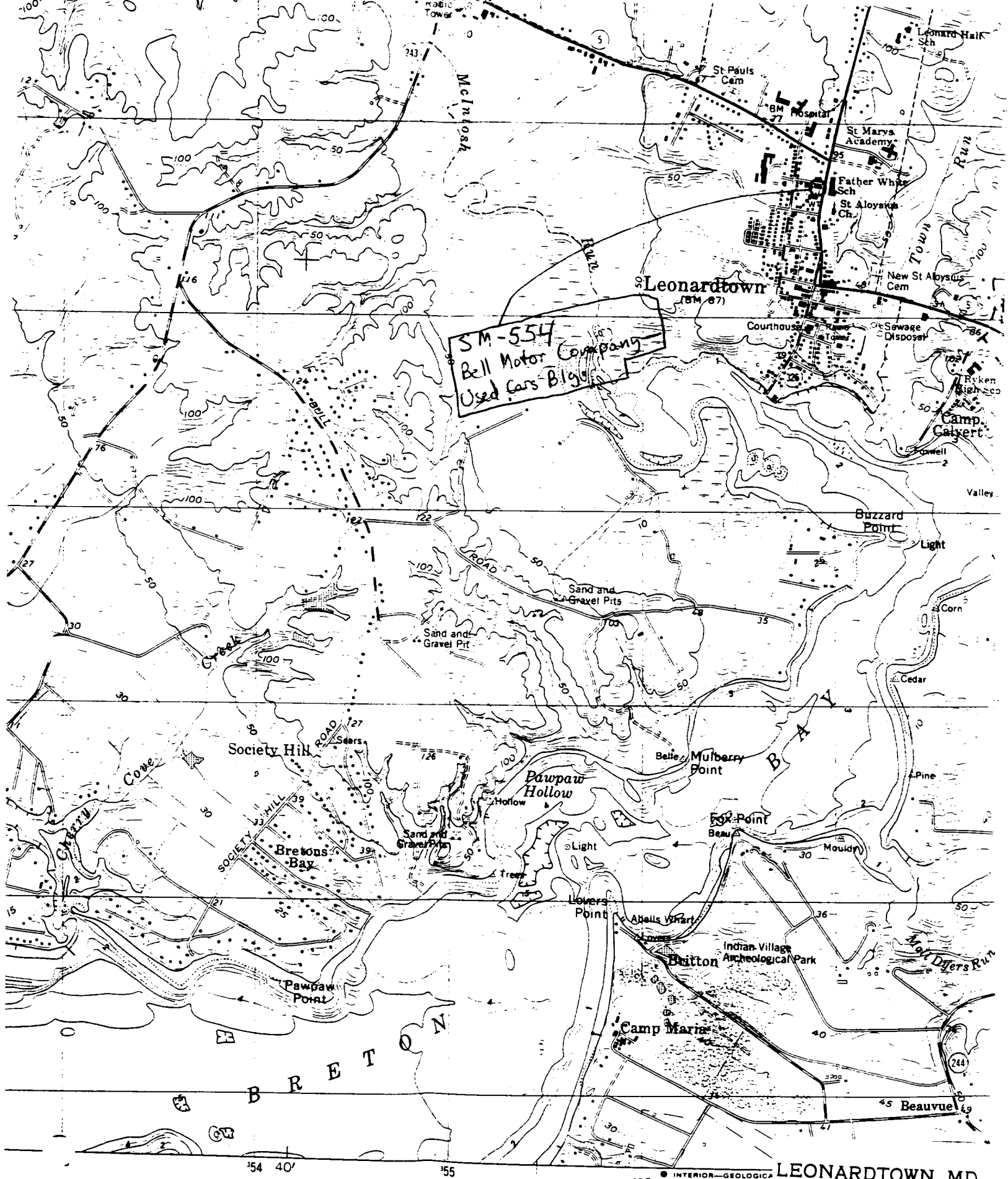
Reference: Liber JFF 4, Folio 361

Grantee: Asa A. Lawrence

Grantor: Joseph H. Key and Robert C. Combs, trustee

Date: December 2, 1880

Notes: Key and Combs execute a confirmatory deed to clarify ownership of the land by Lawrence. Apparently Maria Key had sold a number of parcels without executing deeds.



1963  
3ATHMETRY ADDED 1982  
PHOTOREVISED 1984  
DMA 5660 1 SW-SERIES V833



